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SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA CAUTIOUS ON CUBA

REF: STATE 131637

¶1. PolOff delivered reftel points to Martin Podstavek, desk officer for Latin America at the Slovak MFA. Podstavek appreciated the information about the recent U.S. engagement with the GOC, particularly on improving communication opportunities for the Cuban people. Podstavek said that the Slovaks have been consulting closely with their Czech colleagues in advance of the EU discussions on Cuba during the Spanish presidency. Slovakia will continue to support the balanced two-track approach, engaging both the GOC and the opposition, and does not support an extreme position either way.

¶2. Slovakia continues to prioritize development of bilateral trade relations; in October 2008 the two countries signed a bilateral economic cooperation agreement and in April 2009 there was a mixed commission meeting in Havana. The Slovaks estimate that the Cubans have unpaid debts to the Slovak government from the communist era totaling approximately 11 million euros, and they are actively seeking compensation for these debts. In 2007, Slovakia had a positive trade balance of 25 million dollars; in 2008 just over 6 million dollars.

¶3. In October 2008, at our request, the GOS accepted eight Cuban political refugees from Guantanamo and resettled them in Central Slovakia with some success. Six of the eight remain. On a December 2009 trip to Washington, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Robert Kalinak agreed to take an additional two to four refugees from Guantanamo, and we are continuing to pursue this second resettlement with the GOS.

¶4. Generally, Slovakia's position with respect to human rights in Cuba is threefold. First, the Slovaks believe that human rights concerns should be raised during high level visits. Second, the Slovaks believe that GOC should not prevent Slovaks from meeting with the political opposition. And third, dialogue with the GOC should not be stalled because of a perceived lack of progress on human rights.

EDDINS